

VZCZCXRO0208
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0450/01 0470515
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 160515Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5753
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000450

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS UPDATE PART 3: TIMING

REF: A. O/I 2/10
 [1](#)B. O/I 2/12
 [1](#)C. BAGHDAD 221
 [1](#)D. BAGHDAD 333

Classified By: Acting Deputy Political Counselor Richard H. Riley for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Passage of "The Law of the Governorates Not Organized Into a Region (Provincial Powers)" on February 13 has set into motion a timetable for holding provincial elections in Iraq this year. While we believe the elections deadline as outlined in the law is overly ambitious given its timing during Ramadan, it does put provincial elections at the political forefront, which increases the likelihood they could be held before the end of 2008. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has adjusted its own timetable for providing technical assistance to reflect the accelerated pace outlined in the law, and we will work closely with the international community to apply diplomatic pressure where needed to ensure credible elections will be held this year. This is the third in a series of cables describing the process and preparations for holding provincial elections, as well as a probable timetable for events that must occur before provincial elections can be held. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) This cable draws from conversations held with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), and the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).

AMBITIOUS TIMING

[1](#)3. (C) On February 13 the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) passed "The Law of the Governorates Not Organized Into a Region (Provincial Powers)". This set into motion a timetable for holding provincial elections this year. Article 55 (First) states, "The Council of Representatives shall legislate the Councils Election Law that will be formed according to this law within a period of 90 days from the date on which the law was approved by the Council of Representative." According to this article, an elections law must be passed by the CoR by May 14. Also, Article 55 (Second) states, "The elections of the new councils shall be held no later than October 1, 2008." Because the month of Ramadan will begin on or about September 2 and the three-day Eid-al-Fitr holiday will begin on or about October 1, we believe this timetable is ambitious. We believe a more plausible scenario would be provincial elections occurring sometime between October 5 and November 20. Iraqis will begin traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj towards the end of November with Eid-al-Adha holidays beginning on or about December 8.

PROBABLE TIMELINE

14. (C) The CoR is now in recess and will return in mid-March, reaching quorum strength with the return of the Kurds on March 21. By then, it will have less than 60 days to pass an election law. We are working closely with the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to provide a team of legislative drafting experts to assist members of the CoR in crafting a well-thought-out law. In addition, we have developed an inter-embassy elections roundtable to engage with key foreign missions in Baghdad in an effort to increase diplomatic pressure to ensure provincial elections will be held in 2008. At the same time, IFES' work on converting the Public Distribution System (PDS -- the food rations database) into a draft voter registry will be complete and ready for vetting in the provinces once an elections law is passed. At that time, the draft voter registry will be distributed to the provinces for the four-week display period, which will end on approximately June 14. Any corrections to the draft registry will be collected and sent to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) for updating. (Note: During the voter registration period in the run-up to the 2005 elections, IFES reported approximately 1.1 million updates were submitted. End Note) UNAMI estimates that updating and reprinting the voter registry will take approximately 90 days, bringing us to approximately September 13. IFES, however, believes the timing could be shortened by several weeks with the voter registry ready as soon as early September.

SO MUCH TO DO, SO LITTLE TIME

15. (C) Because the Provincial Powers law requires an election law be passed within 90 days and provincial elections held before October 1, the Special Representative

BAGHDAD 00000450 002 OF 002

of the Secretary General (SRSG) Staffan de Mistura decided to alter his original plan to clean house in the Governorate Electoral Offices (GEO) by having all GEO managers and staff effectively dismissed by not renewing their contracts (ref A and B). He changed his focus, deciding instead to assist IHEC in hiring the remaining eight GEO managers (ref C), adding an extra UN-endorsed step to the process. (Note: Eight GEO director positions have remained vacant while the CoR has wrestled with the political volatility surrounding the appointments. Previous reporting stated seven vacancies remained due to the interim appointment of the Wassit GEO director. End Note) De Mistura set a 43-day timeline for the UN to vet applications for the remaining eight GEO managers positions for Ninewah, Karbala, Najaf, Diyala, Wassit, Basra and Baghdad (which is allotted two GEO slots). The top 10-15 applicants selected through the UNAMI process will then be passed to the CoR for its selection of five candidates to be submitted to IHEC. IHEC will then make the final selection of the candidate to fill each of these remaining eight GEO manager positions. This process should be completed by March 28 and allow all GEO managers and staff to be trained when the election law is passed.

16. (C) Depending on available funding, and concurrent with passage of the election law and updating of the voter registry, the State Department-funded partner institutes operating in Iraq, including the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) will begin planning voter education campaigns, campaign training for political parties, selection and fielding of elections monitors and support to media outlets. IFES will also continue working on capacity building with IHEC and GEO managers and staff on elections preparations and public outreach. In addition, UNAMI has brought in a security expert who is consulting with IHEC on developing a security plan for the voter registry update period and election day.

COMMENT

17. (C) With the passage of the Provincial Powers law, provincial elections are now at the forefront of the Iraqi political agenda. Article 55 includes a compressed legislative timetable for holding elections. We find it ambitious, if only because the projected October 1 election date falls during the month of Ramadan and would even overlap with the Eid holidays. All stakeholders in the Iraqi electoral process will have to move quickly to pass an election law, register newly emerging political parties and candidates, determine polling locations, and design security plans. Iraqi organizations working like clockwork is not something we have come to expect. However with a coordinated diplomatic effort in addition to the work being done by UNAMI, IFES, IRI, NDI and IREX, it is conceivable that elections could be held before the end of 2008. End Comment.
CROCKER